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DOE/NNSA Cites BWXT Y-12 for Price-Anderson Violations at the Y-12 Plant

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Department of Energy's (DOE) National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has issued a Preliminary Notice of Violation (PNOV) to BWXT Y-12, the contractor that manages and operates the Y-12 Plant for the United States government.

The PNOV was issued for violations of nuclear safety rules and procedures involving (1) a container explosion in a glovebox associated with the newly built Saltless Direct Oxide Reduction (SDOR) pilot facility and (2) continuing violations of Y-12 Plant Safety Basis requirements. In the case of the SDOR event, inadequacies in site hazards analyses and design controls resulted in an unmitigated chemical process hazard. In the case concerning Safety Basis implementation, BWXT Y-12 has not effectively resolved the underlying causes associated with violations of fundamental facility safety requirements so as to prevent their recurrence.

A glovebox is a fully enclosed and ventilated containment device, which is used to protect workers from radioactive materials. The SDOR event resulted in gross container failure, loss of glovebox containment, a spread of radioactive contamination within the facility, and a minor unplanned radiological exposure to a worker. Since a surrogate material was used in the operation, there was no impact from this event to the public or environment. The Safety Basis violations did not result in any immediate consequences to site workers or the public. DOE/NNSA took this action because, if not corrected, the violations could lead to events with potentially more significant worker and public radiological consequences. The DOE/NNSA also took this action because BWXT Y-12 also failed to adequately address in a timely manner problems in some areas addressed in the PNOV.

To emphasize the importance of maintaining a quality program for DOE activities that comply with all requirements, DOE/NNSA is assessing BWXT Y-12 with a civil penalty in the amount of \$82,500. The violation associated with the SDOR event was mitigated by 50% of the maximum civil penalty for recently implemented corrective actions that were a result of a prompt and self-critical assessment and response to the events. The violation associated with the longstanding Safety Basis implementation deficiencies, which have persisted for several years, did not meet the criteria for mitigation of the associated penalty.

The Price-Anderson Amendments Act of 1988 authorized the DOE/NNSA to undertake enforcement actions against contractors for violations of its nuclear safety requirements. The enforcement program is designed to promote proactive efforts by contractors to correct procedural violations so that more serious events are prevented.

Additional details on this and other enforcement actions are available on the Internet at <http://www.eh.doe.gov/enforce>

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